

*Anna Kosiarz-Stolarska*

Uniwersytet Jagielloński  
Kraków

## Dialogue between “academic tribes” and “territories”

When I was listening to Prof. Anna Niżegorodcew’s paper during the seminar, the first reflection which came to my mind was that although the academic discipline embracing foreign language teaching seems to be relatively homogenous, it is actually diverse. Different target languages and their traditions of teaching determine to a great extent what actually happens in the classroom.

I would like to illustrate this claim with an observation from my recent experience of teaching English to students who major in German in the Foreign Language Teacher Training College. It is important to note that the students learnt English as their second foreign language. When a group of teachers from the English section of the College began to teach the students, we were surprised to hear that the students did not like the course. In fact, the students complained that “they were learning nothing”. As a coordinator of the group of the teachers, I felt responsible for the organization of the course and decided to investigate the problem. I did not think that the teachers were the main reason why the students did not like the classes; all of them were experienced professionals. When asked about the main source of their dissatisfaction with the course, the students explained that they expected translation exercises and tests in every class. The communicative way of testing English and the lack of translation exercises made them feel that their language progress was not sufficient. The Grammar-Translation Method the students had been exposed to in their German classes caused the students to treat translation as an indispensable part of successful foreign language learning.

Now I can see a positive aspect of the situation, by which I was originally baffled. I think that being exposed to different methods of teaching a foreign language can be beneficial to future teachers of English and German. Prospective teachers can observe how the different techniques they experience as foreign language students are put into real classroom practice. The methodological diversity that students experience as they learn two foreign languages is very likely to enrich their teaching expertise in their future work. I hope that the exposure to different methods and techniques will initiate the process of reflecting, evaluating and analyzing a complex nature of a foreign language classroom and result in creative teaching in the future.

My second comment concerns the analysis of the dialogue between conference participants Prof. Anna Niżegorodcew presents in her paper. This analysis reminds me of a book which I read some time ago, namely *Academic Tribes and Territories* by Tony Becher (1989, Open University Press). The book discusses the metaphor of academics from various disciplines seen as members of different “academic tribes” and occupying

different “academic territories”. Although Tony Becher’s research concerns the differences between the academic culture of humanities and sciences, I think we can apply this metaphor to describe the different worlds of academic discourse of the conference participants described by Prof. Nizegorodcew. Teachers of different foreign languages belong to different “tribes”, each having their distinctive cultures. Problems in the dialogue between members of those different tribes result from differences between those cultures.

Prof. Nizegordcew’s paper is an attempt to understand the differences between members of “academic tribes” of different foreign language “territories”. Nowadays we can observe that there is no one theory or approach which could be applied to teaching all foreign languages. It is the target language that determines the methodology of teaching it. The reasons for this situation are of social and cultural origin, including, among others, negative attitudes to the privileged position of the English language in foreign language learning and teaching or inability to read in English, as Prof. Nizegorodcew points out.

What should be done to make the dialogue between different “academic” tribes more successful? Summarizing his research Becher says that it should be possible for people in different academic worlds to influence one another. The first step in this dialogue is to accept the depth of the differences. Another step requires understanding those differences. Prof. Nizegorodcew’s paper helps us to achieve both aims and in this way to make the academic dialogue more successful and efficient.